

Province Profile - Herat



Key Issues

Herat's Security Environment

- **Taliban activity** spread from the south into Afghanistan's western provinces in 2005 but remains relatively low. Latest figures for IED attacks in Herat during Jan-May 2009 record 13 incidents (in comparison to over 250 in Kandahar).
- Alleged **Iranian support** for insurgent groups in western Afghanistan is of concern. Caches of weapons with Iranian, Russian and Chinese markings have regularly been seized having entered Afghanistan via the Iranian border.
- Expulsion of **Afghan refugees** from Iran into western Afghanistan has contributed to instability in Herat's region.
- The **drug trade** remains a destabilizing factor in the west of Afghanistan. A UN report charted a 109% increase in opium production in Herat province last year.

Regional Strongman - Ismail Khan

- Persian speaking Sunni Tajik, known as the '**Lion of Herat**', he led insurrections against both Soviet forces and the Taliban from his powerbase in Herat.
- Twice governor of Herat, once during the 80s, and again until his transfer to central government in 2004, he still enjoys **considerable local support** and is commonly credited for much of the province's prosperity.
- Appointed **Minster of Energy and Water** in Dec 2004, until the Afghan parliament rejected his reappointment in Jan 2010.
- Maintains important ties and **relationships with Iran**, having spent several years in exile there, making him an important power broker in the region.
- Human Rights Watch has accused him of **human rights abuses**, though he is considered a relative 'moderate' of the Afghan warlords.

Iranian Influence

- **Connections with Iran are strong** in Herat. Shared historical links of Silk Road trade underlie modern social links forged via returning Afghan refugees and temporary migratory workers to Iran; and a legacy of political support for Afghan leaders remains from Soviet and Taliban eras.
- After the Taliban's fall news [reported](#) that Iran had supplied Ismail Khan with at least twenty truck loads of cash between November and December 2001.

International Trade, Transport Links and Economy

- Most of **Afghanistan's trade with Iran** passes from Herat through the Islam Qala crossing and into Iran. Herat City is also connected to Kabul, Kandahar, Iran and Turkmenistan through the Ring Road— making Herat a major hub for trade in the region.
- The construction of roads and railways has helped boost trade in western Afghanistan. A **191-kilometer railway** built by Iran connects Khaf in northern Iran to Herat.
- Herat is considered to be **one of the richest provinces in Afghanistan** in terms of agriculture and industry. Herat City has a relatively educated population and professional class, and good infrastructure including reliable utilities and clean streets.

In the News

Channel 4 News reports that Taliban insurgency is being supported by Iranian weapons smuggled over the border including mines and plastic explosives. ([C4](#))

Key Facts

- **Governor of Herat Province:** Eng. Muhammad Yousuf Nuristani (since Jan 2009)
- **Provincial Capital:** Herat (city)
- **Size:** 24,362 square miles (about the size of West Virginia).
- **Members of Parliament:** 17 including 5 women, out of 249 total house members.

Total Herat Province Population: 1.76 million

- Three quarters live in rural areas of province.
- Majority of population is evenly split between Dari-speaking Tajiks, and Pashtuns
- Hazara, Uzbek and Turkmen minorities

Literacy and education:

- Around 40% of men and 28% of women in Herat are literate – slightly higher than the national average of approx 28%.
- Just over half of children aged 6-13 are enrolled in school.

Economy of Province:

Agriculture (36%), livestock (20%) and non-farm day labor (46%) account for the majority of household income in Herat.

Infrastructure:

- 22% of population has access to electricity, but this drops to only 6% in rural areas.
- 31% has access to safe drinking water.
- 14% has access to sanitary toilet facilities.
- The vast majority of roads are car-worthy, given seasonal conditions.
- Over 70% of population has access to a phone

Herat's Provincial Reconstruction Team

(PRT) is run by the Italian government.

Possible Questions

- What is being done to promote Afghan exports and economic performance through Herat's international trade links?
- What is the reason for the dramatic increase in opium production in Herat last year?
- How successful is the Italian-led PRT in Herat and what lessons can be drawn from its activities?

Map Source
• [Long War Journal](#)